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SURVIVING TEN YEARS: A PRINCIPLED STAND

Ten years ago on 11 June 1991 a small group of men and women decided at a meeting in Marchmont Community Centre, to reconstitute the Socialist Party of Great Britain. As members of Camden (Bloomsbury) and North West London Branches, we had been expelled from the Clapham Party for holding propaganda meetings; outdoor and indoor, in the name of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, so it seemed logical at the time that we would carry on our normal activity.

Discussion took place on what to call this new organisation to avoid confusion with the so-called Socialist Party at 52 High Street, Clapham, and eventually it was decided that, as we had fought to retain the name Socialist Party of Great Britain, that was how we should be known in the future.

At the time many of us wondered if we had done the right thing. Should we have bowed down to the dictates of the Clapham Party to preserve the unity of the Socialist movement? Could we, as a tiny group, survive? There was one opponent who had no doubt whatsoever: Steve Coleman, one of the leading lights behind the plans for our expulsion said at a Delegate Meeting, October 1991: *“they were an undemocratic leadership of about 20 individuals which would fall to pieces within a couple of years through being unable to resolve the political differences that existed amongst the leading personalities involved”*. How wrong he was. We are still here. But where is Steve Coleman?

So we embarked on course as the sole voice for scientific Socialism in this country. Our membership included some excellent writers and nine accredited speakers, plus the back-up members so essential for any organisation. We realised the need to have a journal to air our views, so we decided to continue with the publication of SOCIALIST STUDIES, two issues of which had been published by the two Branches prior to their expulsion.

During these ten years we have published 38 issues of SOCIALIST STUDIES, dealing with some of the fundamental aspects of the Socialist case as well as many topical issues of the day. We have also dealt with views expressed by the Clapham Party, which we consider run contrary to the Declaration of Principles, charges which the Clapham Party have never attempted to answer.

We have also placed on record the underhand – no- downright anti-Socialist antics of the Clapham Party in trying to put us out of business. They stopped our bank account on the pretext that money donated to us (some of it by their own members) was really meant for them and that we were engaged in fraudulent activity. We took the matter to Court, and despite their tame solicitor telling the court that the Clapham Party was *“a charity”*, we won the day. The Clapham Party even asked the Police to investigate us for fraud and also wished to know if we had registered with the Inland Revenue for tax purposes. You cannot get much lower than that. They tried, with some success, to stop the media from accepting our advertisements, and advised other political parties and organisations not to debate with us. But we shrugged off these vicious attacks and continued with the task that we had set ourselves: of carrying out

Socialist propaganda in the name of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

The publication of a wide range of pamphlets has been one of our great achievements – 17 so far. Not only publishing them, but also selling them. Up and down the country at conferences of trade unions and political parties, public meetings and demonstrations, our literature stands have stood out with a small band of members distributing leaflets and selling our literature. At our first Tolpuddle Rally, sales amounted to just £8. Imagine to our delight when sales at the 2000 rally came to £82. Our WOMEN AND SOCIALISM pamphlet is in its 5th reprint and MARXISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY are stocked by a number of shops in the Waterstone/Dillon chain. Two of their shops take our new pamphlet, Capitalism's Future and we are sure that this will be a popular seller.

Total literature sales last year amounted to £925. It is not only with written propaganda that we have made our mark. Close on 100 lectures over the last ten years covering a wide range of topics; a few debates, but not one with the Clapham Party who refuse to accept our challenge. We have held dozens of outdoor meetings in Hyde Park with encouraging literature sales, and on Sunday June 10th we shall hold our tenth Summer School. Apart from some excellent lectures, these have also provided a good social atmosphere. All this activity has stretched our membership to the full and our task falls on fewer and fewer shoulders as obituaries appear in our journal marking the death of members.

It would be nice to report a surge in membership but despite some new members joining, it has not been a flood. Whilst many prospective members have shown interest, our insistence on a certain degree of Socialist knowledge and the ability to defend or OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES seems to be a stumbling block. But we are not prepared to water down our principles in order to boost numbers.

After ten years the question can be asked: was it worth it? And the answer is an emphatic yes. It has been hard work, but enjoyable and at times fun. We look forward to the years ahead, confident that the step we took on the 11th June 1991 was the correct one and determined to build on the foundations we laid on that day.

Those of you who knew our late Comrade Hardcastle (Hardy) will have no hesitation in acknowledging his role in interpreting the works of Karl Marx and relating them to the modern world of capitalism. Among his papers he left when he died were some notes and essays dealing with various aspects of Marxism and fundamental issues concerning the economics of capitalism. These ten papers deal with Mortgages, Banking and Credit, Privatisation and so on. Together they can form a "*Socialist Education Series*" and we aim to publish them over the coming months as separate papers at a reasonable price. Further details will appear in the next issue of SOCIALIST STUDIES.

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THE GENERAL STRIKE – SEVENTY FIVE YEARS ON

The so-called General Strike took place 75 years ago in the nine days 4th – 12th May 1926 in support of the coal miners, but when it failed the miners stayed out for seven months before being forced back on the coal miners' terms.

It also meant the formation of a rival miners' union based in the Nottingham coalfield.

In 1926 coal was for all practical purposes the only source of energy. There were over a million miners, almost the highest total ever reached.

If ever there was a time when a strike by miners could be expected to have a decisive effect it was in 1926 – especially as the miners belonged to the Triple Alliance along with the Dockers and Railwaymen who, between them, wholly dominated transport.

With the suspension of the gold standard in 1914 prices rose fast until 1920. The government then decided to operate a deflation policy through reduction of the paper currency in circulation. Prices fell drastically until 1922 and more slowly until 1925, when the gold standard was restored. A version of events leading up to the miners' strike in 1926 put out in Labour Party circles was that the wage reductions called for by the coal owners in 1925 were caused by the re-introduction of the gold standard in 1925. That was a wildly inaccurate representation of what happened.

The strike in 1926 was about wages and the hours of work. The 1926 strike was against private coal owners; nationalisation did not come until 1947. During the strike the government threw all its weight against the strikers. In 1926 a prominent question was government subsidies to the coal industry. The withdrawal of subsidies helped to provoke the strike. The 1926 strike was followed by a tightening of the law against the unions in the 1927 Trade Disputes Act. In 1926 the government had long been prepared for the strike, special organisations having been set up for that purpose.

One aspect of the 1926 strike recalled an event that took place years earlier, when the Triple Alliance of Miners, Dockers, and Railwaymen organised a kind of "*general strike*" against British military involvement in Russia. What was at issue was the ability of the government to intervene decisively. The year 1919 was marked by widespread strikes, including unsuccessful strikes by some police, by a number of mutinies in the army, and riots and attacks on the police. It was against that background that the government faced the Triple alliance in 1919.

An account of what happened was published in THE TIMES (16 November 1979). The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, called the Triple Alliance leaders to meet him and told them: "*the army is disaffected and could not be relied on...If you carry out your threat and strike you will defeat us. But if you do so have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For if a force arises in the State which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State. Gentlemen, have you considered and, if you have, are you ready?*"

According to the account in THE TIMES, the miners' leader, Robert Smillie said: "*We were beaten and we knew we were*".

The strike did not take place. It is evident that the issue raised by Lloyd George in 1919 overshadowed the TUC General Council in 1926. They went into the general strike reluctantly and seized the first excuse to call it off. Long before 1926 the government had overcome its problems with the police and army. It confronted the general strike and the coal miner's strike confident of its ability to defeat them and resolved to do so no matter what the cost.

The term "*general strike*" is somewhat misleading. The number of workers on strike was only 1,580,000, apart from over a million miners. This was not because the TUC was unable to get the workers to strike, but because those on strike (mainly transport workers, building workers, printers and engineers) were chosen to make maximum impact, without causing unnecessary and useless hardship to other workers.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain had, at the time, much to say about the strike, based on an understanding of the realities of Capitalism and recognition of the fact that a politically confident government, with effective control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, can defeat any strike if it is prepared to use its power to the limit. For example, the Socialist Standard in April 1919 states that – giving the backing of the state power – "*on the economic field the masters are in a far stronger position than the workers and can beat them any time they decide to fight to the finish*".

In the issue for April 1922 an editorial urged the unions to take united action. It pointed out that the employers were taking on one section of the workers after another:-

"How can the situation be tested? There is only one way. The organised workers must take united action to hold up industry. It is not a sectional question. The whole of the workers are involved and if they remain divided they will be attacked and beaten, in detail, by the employers...First the stoppage must not be allowed to drag on indefinitely. If it does not achieve its purposes in a short, sharp, action then it will have failed and the men must accept the inevitable for the present.

Second, it must be carried out peaceably. Any attempt at riot or destruction must be sternly repressed as it would at once give the signal for the use of the armed forces against defenceless men.

Third, the decisions to come out and go back must be in the hands of the rank and file. No power should be given to leaders – revolutionary or otherwise – to decide these points.

Such action would cause practically no increase in the misery that already exists and it would be a real test of the situation”

There were then, and still are, other voices – organisations urging workers to take violent action, or to rely on indefinite strikes – as if the workers can hope to starve the employers and government into submission.

Of course, the article went on to remind the workers that strikes only deal with the effects of capitalism without looking to the causes and emphasised the need to take political action for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism.

Erratum

In the article Myths of the 20th Century (SOCIALIST STUDIES 38) we stated erroneously that Lenin had remarked that it would take the working class “1000 years” to establish Socialism by themselves. In fact, he thought it would take “500 years”. So, workers have 417 years left to prove Lenin and his followers wrong. Socialism could be established now. All the necessary technical preconditions exist; co-operative social labour and the means of production with the potential of producing abundance. What is missing is class-consciousness; a Socialist majority taking conscious and political action to replace capitalism with common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society. Workers should quickly organise together in a principled Socialist party and show intellectuals like Lenin and his latter-day followers that workers can think and act for themselves without any need for a self-appointed leadership.

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THE SPGB: A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The question of means and ends has an important bearing on the Socialist Party of Great Britain and its relation to other groups who appear to have the same object of a wageless, classless social system in which production and distribution takes place purely to meet human need.

These groups, usually anarchists, anarcho-communists or groups based around the industrial unionism of De Leon, deny the political programme and the parliamentary action advocated by the Socialist Party of Great Britain and so do not share our analysis of capitalism. Yet they claim they share the same objective. Our objective is clearly stated as: “*the establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interests of the whole community*”.

What these anarchists and others forget is that the SPGB’s Socialist object is not an add-on extra. The Socialist object can only be stated because of the eight principles of the Party which precede it.

Reading through the SPGB’s OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, published in every edition of Socialist Studies, the following three interrelated processes unfold: an analysis of capitalism, the political means to establish Socialism, and the role of the socialist party and the working class.

The importance of Means and Ends

Those who allegedly share the SPGB’s Socialist objective do not share with us the relationship between analysis,

political programme, political action and Socialist objective. If you do not accept the first stages in the political process how can you accept the conclusion?

Take, for instance, John Crump's argument in his paper, "*The Thin Red Line: Non-Market Socialism in the Twentieth Century*" (NON-MARKET SOCIALISM IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES, edited by Maximillien Rubel and John Crump, 1986). He argued that the objective similarities in the aims of the SPGB and the other groups in his paper constituted the "*core*" but the difference in the means (the periphery) proposed were of secondary importance. As he concluded: "*the fierce polemics over the means to achieve Socialism which non-market Socialists have engaged in have been largely academic*" (p.51). However, there cannot be an artificial split between means and ends. The means determine the end. In not recognising that the means determine the ends, Crump's Manifesto is utopian not scientific.

A similar fallacy is made by DISCUSSION BULLETIN in the US and Heresy, a political journal published in Britain. And it is also the error held by those who took control of the old SPGB with their repudiation of Clauses 6 and 7 of the declaration of Principles and their use of political "*forums*" to avoid "*fierce polemics*" with those groups cited by Crump allegedly "*close to the Party*".

And it is quite clear that groups like the De Leonists do not even share the same Socialist objective as the Socialist Party of Great Britain. As a consequence of its own defective analysis of capitalism and a future Socialist society, the De Leonist Society of Canada still clings to the unnecessary and discredited use of "*labour vouchers*" in Socialism (DISCUSSION BULLETIN NO. 102, July-August 2000). Socialism will entail a moneyless society of direct access to what is needed to live a worth-while life.

Achieving an Objective

An analogy will help to explain why there are fundamental differences between the SPGB and groups like the De Leonist Society of Canada and the Socialist Labour Party.

Consider two groups who want to go to the moon. The first group are unscientific and just clap their hands in the belief that it is sufficient to get them to the lunar surface. They cannot understand what is necessary to get them to the moon and no matter how hard they clap their hands they remain firmly on Earth.

The second group also wants to go to the moon. They use raw resources to create the rocket fuel, use technology to construct the rocket, train the astronauts, and build a space ship, apply mathematics and physics, adopt computer systems, set up a mission control and then fly to the moon.

The first group who want to get to the moon are very much like the anarchists, anarcho-communists and direct actionist groups who appear on the pages of DISCUSSION BULLETIN and HERESY. The Socialist Party of Great Britain is like the second group who use practical means to get to the moon. The difference is between wishful thinking, utopianism and idealism on the one hand and practical realism on the other.

Business – the “new” Religion

“What is new is...the belief among opinion-makers that there is something divine, something inherently democratic about markets”

The Logic of Business

“Markets may look like democracy, in that we are all involved in their making, but they are fundamentally not democratic. We did not vote for Bill Gates; we didn't all sit down and agree that we should only use his operating system and we should pay for it however much he thinks he is right. We do not go off to our jobs checking telephone lines or making cold calls or driving a fork-lift every morning because this is what we want to do: we do it because it is the only way we can afford food, shelter and medicine. The logic of business is coercion, monopoly and the destruction of the weak, not “choice” or “service” or “universal affluence” Thomas Frank, ONE MARKET UNDER

THE RECONSTITUTED SPGB, A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

The statement below was issued by the reconstituted Socialist party of Great Britain on 11 June 1991.

Statement on formation of the new Socialist Party of Great Britain The Socialist Party of Great Britain was reconstituted on 11th June 1991. All those who took part in the formation of the new party had been expelled from "The Socialist Party" on 7th May 1991 for what was described as "undemocratic behaviour". This consisted of continuing to hold propaganda lectures in the name of Socialist Studies when that name had been proscribed by the 1988 Annual Conference on the grounds that the name The Socialist Party of Great Britain was nationalistic. From then on all propaganda had to be in the name of "The Socialist Party".

We do not accept that the abbreviation of the Party's name was the real reason for our expulsion. The real reason is that a majority of the active membership do not agree with the Party case as expressed within the framework of the Declaration of Principles. They have ignored these principles and have also undermined the clear meaning expressed within them at successive Annual Conferences in recent years.

For example 1985 Annual Conference carried a resolution calling for the immediate abolition of the State: an anarchist proposition which contradicts the meaning of Clause 6 of the Declaration of principles. This calls on the working class to organise consciously and politically in order that this machinery (including the armed forces) "may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation...". If the State is to be immediately abolished it would be impossible to establish Socialism.

Annual conference 1986 decided to change the Party's name officially to that of the Socialist Party. Henceforth it had two names, both official. Annual Conference 1988 proscribed the use of "Socialist Studies" in propaganda spoken and written, press adverts, leaflets etc. This was a breach of Clause 8 which begins "The Socialist Party of Great Britain therefore enters the field of political action..." Members who stood by this principle and carried it into effect were expelled without charge or hearing for "undemocratic behaviour".

Annual Conference 1990 gave support to non-Socialist democratic reform movements in Eastern Europe which were seeking to replace state capitalist governments with democratic capitalist governments. In October/November 1990 the E.C. threatened to charge N. W. London and Camden/Bloomsbury Branches unless they withdrew a leaflet which contained the statement that the Party was opposed to democratic reform movements. In their letter the E.C. sent a copy of the 1990 Conference resolution. This was in breach of Clause 7, which states "The party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party".

Support for the Polish organisation "Solidarity" had previously been given in a leaflet published by the Pamphlets Committee, which was later reproduced in the Socialist Standard of January 1982. "Solidarity" became the capitalist government in Poland in September 1989 and its main leader, Lech Walesa, became the President. Despite this the E. C. refused to repudiate this leaflet which gave support to Solidarity.

It became increasingly obvious that The Socialist Party was rapidly deteriorating into a mere anti-capitalist reform party. The Socialist Standard recently congratulated the university students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square on their courage in facing up to the armed forces of the State, when inevitably they were slaughtered.

The Socialist Standard generally is a pathetic imitation of the old Socialist Standard. Most of its articles are irrelevant to the real task of a Socialist party which is to get the working class to understand Socialism as a matter of urgency.

The Socialist Standard consists of rambling articles on every other subject except Socialism. It soft peddles on stressing the need for the working class to capture control of the political machinery. In addition it contains misleading information and makes absurd claims which cannot be substantiated. In no way could the Socialist Standard be regarded as a fitting instrument for expressing Socialist ideas.

The Socialist society aimed at by Socialists is briefly defined in the Party's Object. Now it has been defined as something else by Islington Branch, the largest branch in the Party. They speak of "a truly democratic society". Under this meaningless phrase the party has in recent years repeatedly given support to capitalist organisations on the ground that they were "democratic".

"Islington Branch would like to remind all comrades that the object of the Socialist Party is to overthrow capitalism and establish a truly democratic society. The blatantly undemocratic behaviour of some members and the resulting procedural wrangling and personal attacks on fellow members detracts from the revolutionary aim of our Party. This time wasting behaviour is an insult to the efforts of workers around the world who are still suffering and dying for the right to organise democratically" (. E.C. Minutes 15th January 1991

Had we not been expelled it would have been impossible for us to remain in this organisation. We have been forced into existence as were our predecessors in 1904. They were expelled from the Social Democratic Federation for holding propaganda meetings.

We have adopted the Object and Declaration of principles of the 1904 Party as the basis of our propaganda, and we call on those who have any concern for the future of the Socialist Movement to join us. The present "Socialist Party" has no future. It will become more and more reformist and opportunist as the restraints of genuine Socialists are removed. There can only be one Socialist Party, and there can only be one objective, Socialism.

*June 1991
The Socialist party of Great Britain
71 Ashbourne Court
Woodside Park Road
London, N12 8SB*

Those who attended the inaugural meeting of the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain on June 11th 1991 were – from Camden (Bloomsbury) Branch; J Bell, O Blomley, J D’Arcy, E. Hardy, L Lestor, L Frank; and from N W London Branch; A D’Arcy, T D’Arcy, D Davies, M Davies, K Knight, R Lloyd, C May, G Wilson, H. Young

J. Ames, a member of the Canadian Party and R MacDonald (member of Clapham) and four visitors were also present.

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IS THE SPGB SECTARIAN?

The Socialist Party of Great Britain was established in 1904 following the expulsion of socialists from the Social Democratic Federation.

The SPGB adopted a Socialist OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES to guide the Party in the political class struggle against “*all other parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist*”. This included, at the time, the Fabians, the Independent Labour Party, the latter who hoped to build “*a golden bridge of palliatives*” between themselves and the Liberals: “*a true line of the progressive apostolic succession*” (MacDonald and Hardy, NINETEENTH CENTURY, January 1899, pages 25-27).

The SPGB’s OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES were informed by the experience of class politics

by the founder members, particularly around the question of accountability and democratic practice within the Party, the dangers of leadership and the issue of social reforms, which had been pursued by the SDF and ILP. The theoretical background of the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES is influenced by Marx's materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and the political concept of the class struggle.

In this respect the SPGB is the only Party in Britain who has a Socialist programme and a Socialist objective.

We have, of course, stressed that if our analysis of capitalism can be shown to be wrong, or if the political programme to achieve Socialism is flawed, or that the Socialist objective is defective then we will look at what our critics say is wrong with our case and study any better solutions for furthering the political interests of the working class towards Socialism. We are not dogmatists but reasonable men and women. To date no refutation of the SPGB's case has been forthcoming.

Obviously, many of our political opponents were under the illusion that they too were Socialists struggling for Socialism. They did not like the SPGB demonstrating to them and their supporters that their own political objective was not Socialism since it would either retain the wages system and class exploitation or lead to unnecessary violence and bloodshed through direct action.

The Party's critics had no reasonable answer to the SPGB's insistence on the necessity for a working class majority to first secure the machinery of government before establishing Socialism, that a Socialist Party must have Socialism as its sole objective and that Socialists must be hostile to those who confuse workers and direct them away from understanding Socialism and acting in their class interests.

It became clear to Socialists that the capitalist Left had no case to offer the working class in as much as they refused to have their theories, policies and political activity tested in open debate. They were reduced to hurling political abuse at us particularly the accusation that we were sectarian. Yet the SPGB, from the start, has been an autonomous political party. We have not splintered into hundreds of factions like the Trotskyists or the Libertarian Left. "*Sectarian*" comes from a whole list of readily available insults used by capitalist politicians – especially those on the Left – and which serve them as a poor substitute for critical analysis and reasoned argument.

So is the accusation of "*Sectarianism*" levelled against the SPGB justified? We believe not.

Here is a typical argument made against Socialists by the Socialist Workers Party:-

"The root cause of sectarianism...is the isolation of the socialists from effective and influential participation in mass struggles...its negative effects – the exacerbation of secondary differences, the transformation of tactical differences into matter of principle, the semi-religious fanaticism which can give a group considerable survival power in adverse conditions at the cost of stunting its potentiality for real development, the theoretical conservatism and blindness to unwelcome aspects of reality – all these persist" (D. Hallas: Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party" in PARTY AND CLASS, 1968, p. 55).

Of the insult, just what does it mean to be "semi-religious"? It is as daft a statement as being "*half-pregnant*". What are "*unwelcome aspects of reality*"? This would presumably include the SPGB's unique, class-based opposition to Lenin and his Party in stating that their *coup d'etat* could not bring about Socialism since the preconditions for a Socialist Revolution did not exist at the time. The SPGB in the 1920's and 1930's, unlike the parties of the Left, denounced the Stalinist show trials and dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat. And what is "*theoretical conservatism*"? Presumably, the SPGB's refusal to accept the anti-working class policies of Lenin and Trotsky.

A similar passage accusing the SPGB of sectarianism can be found in the 1974 internal Party document "REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?" published by a group of "*Libertarian Communists*" - They wrote:-

"The isolation which follows from rejecting all existing social trends and movements as useless and diversionary has self-defeating consequences on the attitude of Socialists".

In the above paragraph the view is put that the result of rejecting all existing social trends and movements as useless and diversionary means that Socialists become isolated and sectarian. They say that “*sectarian socialists*” can offer “*no reason why socialist understanding should spread on a wide scale in the future*”, and therefore Socialism appears to be “*a possibility for the indefinite future rather than an immediate practical alternative*”.

This is precisely the argument put forward long ago by Keir Hardy and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) including the use of the epithet “*sectarian*” about the position of the SPGB to other political parties. The ILP pursued every social reform it felt to be to its political advantage. Where is the ILP today?

Those who deride the SPGB as “*sectarian*” do not support their assertion in any way. The SPGB has always been entitled to claim that relatively few members leave; of those who do remain supporters and a number re-join. It is the reformist parties following the policies of supporting all existing “*social trends and movements*” that have produced disillusionment and pessimism on a large scale. What our critics fail to understand is that there is no “quick fix” to speed up socialist consciousness with the working class.

To be politically small does not mean to be “*sectarian*”. What it does mean is that the vast majority of the working class still support capitalism. We do not overestimate how fast society is changing nor do we underestimate the barriers to revolutionary change. The task at hand is not to be worried about the insults thrown at us by our opponents but to get on with the very real and urgent job of making Socialists.

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TEN YEARS ON: (WHEN AND WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG)

The Socialist Party of Great Britain was reconstituted on 11th July 1991. Because of the anniversary there has been some interest in the historical roots of the split.

What were the causes? One suggestion which we wholly reject is that the Party was formed “before its time”. Had the Party formed later, its problems would have been just as great or greater.

Among the causes of the split was the way in which the old SPGB allowed people to join who were not really Socialists (in both wars the Party received applications for membership from people who were simply anti-war pacifists).

The Party also allowed the study of history and Marxian economics to cease to be a prominent focus of Party activity. There was also the reverence shown by some members to academics and Left Wing theory as though to have Professors and Doctors of Philosophy in the Party would increase its standing and bring in more workers. We can also add to this degeneration a flirtation by some Party members with anarchist groups and social reform organisations in order to increase the size of the Party. Symptomatic of this decline in members’ understanding of the socialist case was the emergence of factions willing to ride roughshod over the party’s democratic procedures and democratically agreed rules.

The process which finally led to the reconstitution of the Socialist Party of Great Britain can be traced back at least to the early 1970’s with the circulation of a statement: “*What is it that prevents the SPGB functioning as a Revolutionary Party*”, by John Crump in December 1973. Another statement, “*Where We Stand*”, published the following year, with 12 signatories including those of Crump and Buick, a group who were active in trying to push the SPGB in a different political direction from the one set out in the Party’s OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES.

In his statement Crump wrote of continuing his “*co-operation with those comrades who still remain in the SPGB... and...that they themselves will go on to form links with revolutionary socialists (sic) active outside the SPGB*”.

Crump's link with "revolutionary Socialists" was the pamphlet he wrote: "A CONTRIBUTION TO A CRITIQUE OF MARX" (1976), published by two Council Communist organisations: Social Revolution and Solidarity, both of whom no longer exist.

Ten years later, in 1984, a meeting was held in York by a number of individuals, largely academics. The meeting was kept secret from the SPGB membership. No invitations were issued to Camden and North West London branches to attend. The outcome of this conspiratorial meeting was the 1987 book: NON-MARKET SOCIALISM IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY (edited by Maximillien Rubel and John Crump); the six writers also included SPGB members, Stephen Coleman and Adam Buick. However, none of the SPGB members involved with the group indicated any connection with the Party in their brief "*notes on the contributors*".

A Manifesto: "*A Thin Red Line: Non-Market Socialism in the Twentieth Century*" was written by Crump. The Manifesto was a political umbrella under which Anarcho-Communism, Impossibilism, Council communism, Bordigism and Situationism could shelter together. "*Impossibilism*" is a code for the SPGB. Council Communism refers mainly to Pannekoek's theories of direct action but also covers those groups, like the International Communist current, who argue for the use of Soviets or Workers' Councils; Bordigism refers to Leninist vanguardism; and Situationism refers to a cultural avant-garde movement, whose "*supreme achievement*" was the Paris student revolt of 1968 from whose politics most of the contributors derive their perspective of the world. Crump's thesis was that such groups had a common objective and should disregard their different views on means of achieving their respective political objective.

No disclaimer was made by Adam Buick and Stephen Coleman to disassociate themselves from the groups attending the conference as would have been expected from members of the SPGB.

We do not want to waste space in Socialist Studies reproducing Crump's original document. Sufficient quotations are given in the Camden Branch reply to Crump, printed below, to make his political intentions clear. This debate is of relevance to us now in that the issues which later, in 1991, led to us reconstituting the Socialist Party of Great Britain were already an issue which, in 1974, bitterly divided the Party. The Camden Branch Reply to crump throws a spotlight on the many important theoretical and organisational issues which underlie the split.

CAMDEN BRANCH REPLY TO CRUMP

17th January 1974

1. Statement issued by Crump

In December 1973 a statement "What is it that prevents the S.P.G.B. functioning as a Revolutionary Party" was circulated to the Party.

It is signed by John Crump (who has ceased to be a member on taking up residence in Japan) but with the following explanation of its origin of the views contained in it:-

"It was written solely by me and distributed by me. But no one is pretending either that these are simply the ideas of one isolated and disgruntled member. All the views expressed in this circular have been developed by means of discussion with other comrades and, whatever the differences which may exist between us in detail and points of emphasis, no one should have any doubt that the basic criticism of the S.P.G.B. outlined in this statement commands a fair body of support within the Party itself" (page 1 of Statement).

Crump's name also appeared, along with those of about a dozen members, on whose behalf another statement, "Where We Stand", was issued shortly after the circulation of the statement signed by Crump alone.

2. The S.P.G.B.'s alleged failure to seize Opportunities

Crump alleges (page 2) that the S.P.G.B.'s long history "is very largely an uninterrupted series of missed opportunities", that it has shown "unbelievable slowness and lethargy", that it never even started "operating as a

revolutionary organisation”, that it has a “consistent record of constantly failing even to recognise favourable opportunities as they present themselves, let alone to take serious action in them”.

Among the missed opportunities he lists the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the C.N.D campaigns, and the Labour Government 1966-70.

He tells us that the S.P.G.B. did not make the proper “intervention” or made it too late and therefore failed to exploit the “fairly widespread radicalisation” at work among Labour supporters and others, and consequently failed to recruit more than a handful of members, by contrast with the growth of “nearly all radical groups in Britain” (page 2).

Here as elsewhere he fails to name the “radical groups” and does not tell us what sort of intervention he thinks we should have mounted.

Doubtless if we had changed our Principles so that we could join in the tactics of so-called left-wing organisations, demanding new leaders for the Labour Party, a “more radical” Labour Party programme, and of course telling the workers to vote Labour, we would have increased our membership as they did, but how would this bring Socialism nearer?

In view of his belief that being “radical” is desirable in itself he makes one interesting admission. He writes (page 2) that one of the “radical groups”, the Communist Party, is hardly a radical organisation, is it? Between the wars, the Communist Party was an outstanding advocate of “militant” intervention in every kind of industrial and political protest movement, doing all the things now being done by other so-called left-wing organisations – and it ends up by being, according to Crump, not even “radical”.

Another of his charges of failure is that the S.P.G.B did not adopt a proposal to republish Martov’s **“The State and the Socialist Revolution”** (pages 3-4).

Crump’s account of what occurred is misleading and takes too little account of the necessary work involved. As an example of what he calls “the more ridiculous arguments which were used by the sectarians within the S.P.G.B. in order to defeat this suggestion” he quotes the opinion of the Pamphlets Committee that it would have limited appeal, making it appear that the Pamphlets Committee and the E.C. were opposed to reprinting the work. In fact, the pamphlets Committee and the E.C. did not refuse to consider publication.

The Pamphlets Committee reported to the E.C. that in their opinion “it would be a useful addition to available information about Marxism and the Russian Revolution, but added: - “Before the Committee commences getting information on copyright, preface, and typing draft, etc. and in view of Party commitments on other pamphlets, would the E.C. make a decision on the Delegate Meeting resolution?”

The E.C. decided to defer further consideration until other pamphlets in hand, **“War”**, **“Questions of the Day”** and **“Religion”**, were out of the way.

In considering the amount of work involved, Crump makes no mention of the passing of the resolution by Conference to the E.C., the time that would necessarily be taken in detailed consideration of preparing the preface and the text and the commitments of the S.P.G.B. The passing of a resolution by Conference does not do the work.

Crump’s other point is that it is absurd for the S.P.G.B. to say that Martov’s work should have limited appeal, “since Martov is relatively well-known, a booklet carrying his name was likely to be an infinitely more effective vehicle for socialist ideas than a pamphlet written by an anonymous S.P.G.B. ‘er”.

It is a matter of opinion how well a pamphlet will sell but the Party has had plenty of experience to go on. And is Martov’s name “relatively well-known”, for example “to disgruntled supporters of the Labour Party?”

We note too Crump’s curious view that workers cannot be impressed by logical argument if presented by an anonymous S.P.G.B. er, but will be infinitely more impressed by a name.

3.Organisations supporting the S.P.G.B. 's Concept of Socialism

Crump writes (page 1) that "today there are others who have come to argue that Socialism is a wageless, moneyless, Stateless society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of production". If this is intended to mean that until comparatively recently this situation did not exist it is not correct.

Before and since the founding of the SPGB there have been organisations and individuals with this as their declared ultimate objective differing, however, from the SPGB on methods of achieving socialism, reformist activities, etc.

***The Manifesto of English Socialists** (1890) signed by representatives of the S.D.F., Fabian Society and other organisations (including Morris, Shaw, Hyndman and Webb contained the following:-*

"Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines and the land. Thus we look to put an end and for ever to the wages system, to sweep away all distinctions of class and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis".

*The S.L.P proclaimed the same aim, and the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1923 published "**A Short Course of Economic Science**" by A. Bogdanoff which contained the following:-*

"The new society will be based not on exchange but on "natural" self-sufficing economy. Between production and consumption of products there will not be the market, buying and selling, but consciously and systematically organised distribution" (p.389).

"every State form is an organisation of class domination and this cannot exist where there are no classes" (p. 388).

It was a common experience in our controversies with the Communist Party and even with the I.L.P. that there spokesmen accepted the S.P.G.B. 's definition of Socialism and confined their attacks to questions of method, whether Socialism could be an immediate practical objective and what to do "in the meantime".

Which puts the matter in its right perspective: organisations could say that they accepted Socialism as a distinct objective yet by devoting all their efforts to advocating reforms and State capitalism, supporting capitalist wars, misleading the workers by urging them to seek Socialism through "direct action" and civil war.

Crump does not name the organisations he has in mind which claim to accept the S.P.G.B. 's concept of Socialism so we do not know what their other policies and activities are.

4 Economic Determinism – Crump's Fictional History of the S.P.G.B.

Crump makes no claim now that he stands for the principles on which the S.P.G.B. was formed. On the contrary, he holds that its alleged deficiencies in practice arise from "deficiencies in its theory" (p. 5).

Instead of following the Marxism of Marx the S.P.G.B., according to Crump, took the view that "history" was a mechanical process remorselessly grinding on towards its inevitable destination – "Socialism" (p.5). The bulk of its members were "economic determinists".

*The term "economic determinism" and the interpretation of Marx's Materialist Conception of History as economic determinism is found in a mixed collection of opponents of Marx (e.g. A.D. Lindsay in his "**Karl Marx's Capital**", Oxford University Press, 1925), "improvers" of Marx such as Herman Cahn ("**Collapase of Capitalism**", and "**Capital Today**"), and commentators who have supposed it to be an accurate description (e.g. "**Marx and Engels**" edited by Lewis S. Feuer).*

Prominent among them before, during and after the First World War was Herman Cahn. He held that developments of capitalism which Marx did not and could not foresee had made the imminent collapse of capitalism inevitable.

“That downfall will then be like an act of nature, and not dependent on the mental and moral preparation of the peoples of the world for a new form of society which must, perforce, be completely social”.

He said that all we had to do was to sit back with folded arms and watch it happen.

*Marx of course did not hold such a view, as his summary statement of the Materialist Conception of History in his Introduction to his “**Critique of Political Economy**” makes quite clear. He did indeed hold that “The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life” and that “with the change in the economic foundations the whole vast superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed”, and that there are in history “progressive epochs in the economic system of society” (the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeois), and that “bourgeois productive relationships are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production”, and “with this social system, therefore, the prehistory of human society comes to a close”. But vital to the whole conception for Marx was that it proceeds through periods of social revolution in which “men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out”.*

*In the “**Communist Manifesto**” it was put in the phrase that history “is the history of class struggles”.*

Crump says that the S.P.G.B. did not accept Marx’s view but was founded on the view of history as “a mechanical process” and “economic determinism”. He gives no evidence for this whatever. He does not produce a single statement by the Party that it held this view, or a single statement that it supported Cahn or any other “economic determinist”.

*Any number of statements to the contrary will be found in the **Socialist Standard** (e.g. August 1910, page 91).*

Here Fitzgerald in debate with a Tory is reported as follows:-

“his opponent still persisted in saying that Marx stated that the economic was the only factor, and that man was determined by his surroundings, and in view of that he would read Marx’s own words which were:

“The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation upon which rests the legal and political superstructure. Marx also said ‘Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth’.

There were many articles in the Socialist Standard on the Materialist Conception of History and none put the view attributed to the S.P.G.B. by Crump. Marx’s own statement on the M.C.H. was published in full in the issue for November 1905.

*Crump does offer one quotation which he regards as conclusive proof of his contention. On Page 5 of his Statement he quotes from the **Socialist Standard**, March 1913 as follows:-*

“Society...moves...under the pressure of growing economic forces making a change in social forms inevitable”.

(The emphasis of the word ‘inevitable’ is added by Crump

*The article in question “**Karl Marx in Current Criticism**” by Adolph Kohn went over the whole of Marx’s contribution to Socialist thought, including the M. C. of H. That part reads like a paraphrase of Marx’s summary in the “Critique”. It did not put the “automatic process” “economic determinist” point of view but instead, as Marx did, on the vital element of class struggle. Among the statements made by Kohn but not quoted by Crump are:*

“History since the passing of Primitive Communism had been a history of class struggles”. This class struggle is the cardinal principle of the socialist party”. So for Kohn a decisive factor was the class struggle.

Crump chose, for obvious reasons, not to mention this. The short paragraph from which he selects his sixteen word extract reads as follows:-

“Marx rescued Socialism from the hands of the Utopians and placed it upon a foundation of scientific fact. Not moral appeals but organised political action was the way to fight the capitalists. Society, said Marx, moved not because of changing morals, but under the pressure of growing economic forces making a change in social forms inevitable”.

*Crump thinks that the word “inevitable” proves that the S.P.G.B. was not Marxist, but it was, of course, Marx and Engels who wrote in the **Communist Manifesto**, the following passage which was later reproduced in Marx’s **Capital** (Vol. 1 Kerr Edition, Page 837).*

“What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable”. So, according to Crump’s line of argument Marx, too, was not a Marxist, but a supporter of a “mechanical process” and “economic determinism”

Crump not only gives no evidence that the S.P.G.B held the “automatic process” and “economic determinism” view but actually produces two pieces of evidence which shows that the S.P.G.B. did not.

Those who did hold that view were necessarily committed to the automatic “collapse of capitalism” concept. Crump says (bottom of page 6) that the S.P.G.B. “never subscribed to the belief which was popular among so many social democrats before the First World War that ‘history’ would bring capitalism to a point where it would be forced to collapse”.

He also notes that in the early days of the Party its members maintained “a high level of activity”; he finds this “strange”. Indeed it would have been strange for “economic determinists” to have been active at all: why be active when all they had to do was to sit with folded arms and watch the “mechanical process” do its work

*How completely the S.P.G.B. rejected “economic determinism” is shown in the pamphlet “**Why capitalism will not collapse**” (1932), as for example in the passage:-*

“The lesson to be learned is that there is no simple way out of capitalism by leaving the system to collapse on its own accord. Until a sufficient number of workers are prepared to organise politically for the conscious purpose of ending capitalism, that system will stagger on indefinitely from one crisis to another”.

5 “Guilt by Association”

The idea of “guilt by association” is that you never have to prove that those who you attack actually did anything which can be shown to be blameworthy: instead you accuse them of “associating” with others who acted in this way.

This is Crump’s method when he writes (page 6):-

“There is nothing surprising about the fact that the ‘Marxism’ of the early S.P.G.B. was basically the ‘Marxism’ of the Second International. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how it could have been anything else when we remember that the S.P.G.B. originated as a breakaway from the old Social Democratic Federation”.

He follows this up with the oafish remark that the S.P.G.B. was “the mongrel child of Engels, Kautsky, Hyndman and De Leon”.

The “chain of guilt” goes like this: - Engels, according to Crump, debased Marx’s theories (page 6); Engels had great influence on “the Marxists of Kautsky’s generation” (page 6); Kautsky had enormous influence on the Second International (page 70; and Kautsky was “much admired by the members of the early S.P.G.B. too” (page 7).

The logic is staggering: The S.P.G.B. denounced and broke away from and opposed the S.D.F. and the Second International, opposed Hyndman and de Leon and expelled a branch for supporting the De Leonist S.L.P. which, according to Crump “proves” that the S.P.G.B. took over their wrong theories!

*The S.D.F. and Hyndman were under constant attack in the **Socialist Standard** from the first issue. A large part of*

the Party's first Manifesto was devoted to this. De Leon and the second International were attacked (see for example "**S.S.**" August 1906). The Party tried to get the Second International to accept a socialist – class struggle basis ("**S.S.**" Jan. 1905), and failing to get this declined to send delegates to the Second International's Congress at Stuttgart ("**S.S.**" April 1906) and ceased all connection with the Second International.

But Crump's trump card relates to Kautsky. He tells us (page 7) that Kautsky "was much admired by the members of the early S.P.G.B. too. In fact, his reputation within the S.P.G.B. was so high that of the first five pamphlets produced no fewer than three were translations of Kautsky's works".

The Party did indeed publish as pamphlets ("**From Handicraft to Capitalism**", "**The Working Class**" and "**The Capitalist Class**"), parts of Kautsky's book "**The Erfurter Programme**", and announced in 1906 "our present intention to reproduce the remaining sections of the book in pamphlet form as early as possible, and finally to issue the whole of the work in book form".

It was being specially translated by a Party member and the translation "approved by Kautsky".

So the S.P.G.B. was hypnotised by Kautsky's "reputation", or was it?

For Crump omits to tell the rest of the story. When it comes to the fourth proposed pamphlet, "**The Class Struggle**", the Party found it objectionable on many grounds and refused to publish it (It was later published by the S.D.F.).

It will be observed that Crump does not say what was wrong with the three pamphlets that were published, or that there was anything wrong at all.

This is the "guilt by association" technique.

6 Reforms

Crump (page 7) notes that the S.P.G.B. "was hostile right from the start to the reformist policies pursued by the social democratic parties". But where do Crump and his associates stand? He writes (page 9):-

The "utopians within the S.P.G.B reject many of the efforts of the working class to improve their conditions".

and

the S.P.G.B., does not understand "the crucial importance of the workers' attempts at democratic self-organisation (today this means in a whole range of organisations – tenants' associations, claimants' unions, parent teachers' associations and student unions, to name but a few)";

and

"it is only by engaging in a wide range of day to day struggles that the working class can possibly obtain the confidence in its own ability and the degree of understanding necessary for it to overthrow capitalism".

Further light on what this means is given by the statement circulated by Manchester Branch, of which Crump was a member, to the Delegate Meeting in 1970 and Conference 1971. It contained the following:-

"That the Party should support, i.e. agree with and encourage, working class action to improve workers' living standards not only on the industrial front but also in housing, education, and other welfare fields".

This proposed retrograde change in the Party's attitude to reforms would mean abandoning the attitude the party took at its formation, which was endorsed by Party poll and reaffirmed by Conference Resolution in 1971.

A major reason why the S.P.G.B' broke away from the Social Democratic Federation was the S.D.F.'s support of reforms. The first issue of the "**Socialist Standard**" in September 1904 contained the following about the S.D.F.

“Today for all purposes of effective socialist propaganda they have ceased to exist, and are surely developing into a mere reform party, seeking to obtain the provision of free maintenance for school children”.

(See also Editorial in “S.S. October 1904, “The Futility of Reform”).

In the early days of the Party we were referred to as ‘the small party of good boys’ who could not make a mistake because we did not take part in the day-to-day struggles of workers on the industrial field and the struggles for reforms.

This was the attitude towards us of the S.D.F., the I.L.P., the S.L.P. and the Fabian Society. Robert Blatchford formed the Clarion Fellowship for the purpose of getting into touch with the workers by supporting reforms. About 1910 the Herald League was formed for the same purpose. Two of our members who were speakers, Dickie Fox and Grainger (known in the Party as Ginger), joined the League on the grounds that it was necessary to engage in the workers’ day-to-day struggle (after the 1914 war Grainger re-joined the Party).

So Crump is only repeating an old, old story.

What now has come of the parties and groups that advocated ‘getting among the workers’? The S.D.F. and the Clarion Fellowship and the Herald League have disappeared. The I.L.P., once a very large party, has been reduced to insignificance and the same is true of the S.L.P., while the Fabian Society is just part of the Labour Party. Between the wars many more groups cropped up claiming to find short cuts to socialism by engaging in the workers’ day-to-day struggles and disappeared after a short existence. G.D.H. Cole formed or joined in some thirty such bodies.

*Crump (page 9) backs up his argument with a reference to what Marx and Engels wrote in the “**Communist Manifesto**” about the Owenites and Fourier’s supporters. The reference will be found towards the end of the “Communist Manifesto”, in the last section on “Critical Utopian Socialism and Communism”*

Crump does not actually quote what Marx and Engels wrote about the Owenites and Fourierists. It reads:-

“They, therefore violently oppose all political action on the part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from blind unbelief in the new Gospel”

“The Owenites in England and the Fourierists in France, respectively oppose the Chartists and the reformists”.

As the S.P.G.B. does not oppose political action but, on the contrary, urges it as the all-important working class action to achieve Socialism, the relevance of this to the S.P.G.B. is hard to discover.

Such political action for Socialism stands in sharp contrast with Crump’s advocacy of the Party supporting workers’ attempts to improve their living standards by demanding reforms. It will be observed that Crump does not here commit himself to the view that the workers’ demand for reforms succeed in their object of improving workers’ conditions but only that they should be supported as attempts at self-organisation.

The workers have made many efforts at self-organisation, including the trade unions, the cooperative movement, the Chartists and Owenites, and large numbers of political organisations including the S.P.G.B.

In a very broad sense workers can learn confidence in their ability whenever they undertake democratic organisation, though only too often the effort has, through misdirection, culminated in disappointment sand apathy.

The early enthusiasm for far-reaching social changes shown by the cooperative movement has ended in producing business organisations hardly distinguishable from the rest of capitalism.

The similar voluntary democratic enthusiasm of the trade unions has produced largely apathetic, bureaucratic organisations, increasingly based, not on voluntary membership and democratic control, but on the compulsory

membership of the “closed shop” unions, committed to the Labour Party.

A century and a half of such activity has little enough to show of what Crump calls “the degree of understanding” necessary for the overthrow of capitalism.

Since the workers who engage in these reform campaigns are seeking thereby “to improve their conditions”, most of the political result is to induce workers to vote for whichever party of capitalism undertakes to introduce reform legislation. It is no accident that the trade unions, the cooperatives and all of the so-called left wing organisations tell the workers to vote for the Labour Party.

Crump uses a more specific argument in relation to the idea of “free transport” (page 9). It should be welcomed, he says. “in order to encourage some workers to think beyond the idea of abolishing certain prices...in the direction of a society of completely free access to all products”.

Of course the Party should, as it always has, keep before the workers the concept of a social system with complete “free access”, but the idea of so-called “free transport” under capitalism belongs to a quite different category, the illusion that workers can escape or lessen the burden of the endless wages struggle by getting some things “free” – what Engels derisively described as “all so-called social reforms which aim at saving or cheapening the means of subsistence of the worker”.

By lowering the value of labour-power they reflect themselves in the money wage as the capitalists have always appreciated. Hence the industrial capitalists’ abolition of the Corn Laws (at the expense of the landed interest) to enable cheap food to be imported and enable wages to be correspondingly low; the introduction of “rent control” by a Tory Minister in 1915; the subsidised house building; the government food subsidies and “price controls” of wartime; the provision of free elementary education in place of fee-paying schools etc.

In individual industries the provision of “free” supplements to money wages is as old as capitalism – the “free” board and lodging of farm workers, domestic servants, hotel staff and shop assistants, the hundred years old “free pensions”, “free uniforms” and “free medical attention” of postmen, the “free travel” of railway and other transport workers. It all went along with correspondingly low money wages.

In many cases the demand of the newly organised workers was to have these illusionary “free” supplements turned into cash. What happens if Crump’s army demanding “free supplement” meets the other army demanding that they be turned into cash?

7 Trade Unions *Crump complains (page 8) that the S.P.G.B.’s “commitment to support the trade unions in their efforts to improve workers’ conditions...never takes any concrete form”.*

What “concrete form” could it take? Our limited resources are for our own work.

What the Party has done for the trade unions has been far more valuable than anything “concrete” could have been. The early members, a high proportion of whom had had wide experience in the Unions, applied Marxian economics and political teaching to show trade unionists the possibilities and limitations of trade union action.

The Party urged trade unionists to abandon their trust in leadership; to keep control in their own hands, and have a ballot before a strike and on the acceptance of the employers’ offers; to recognise that the dominant power in society is with those who control the machinery of government, including the armed forces, and that consequently the employers backed by the government can always win if they regard the issue as vital and are prepared to fight it to the end; that therefore if a strike does not succeed quickly it should be called off and a more favourable opportunity awaited; that trade union action cannot dispossess the capitalist class or lead to Socialism; and that support for the Liberal, Tory, Labour or any other party of capitalism should be abandoned.

Nearly two centuries of trade union action on the lines of the S.P.G.B. proposed shows how right we were. If trade unionists had used the Marxian analysis to understand how capitalism works they would have saved themselves from the futility of their belief in the past thirty years that capitalism can be “managed”.

As workers we are all individually engaged in the struggle to improve or defend our wages and conditions of labour but the Socialist Party itself is only concerned with one struggle; the struggle for Socialism. To this end it must keep the struggle as clear as possible of misunderstanding, and from running up blind alleys.

8 The 1914 War and the Russian Revolution Having noted the high level of activity and enthusiasm among Party members up to 1914, Crump writes (page 7):-

“The First World War and the Russian Revolution between them proved a traumatic experience for the economic determinists within the S.P.G.B. however. Well over half the membership fell away – presumably disillusioned because “history” seemed to have let them down...”

Of course they were not “economic determinists” and “half the membership” did not fall away because they were disillusioned or persuaded that the Party’s principles and policy were unsound. The number of workers who left to support the war or to join the Communist Party were a tiny handful.

It was war conditions themselves which set the Party back. For four years propaganda opportunities were curtailed, members scattered, many were “on the run”, in prison or Home office camps, others had left the country or were forced to move to get a living, with disastrous effects on branch organisation, and a small number who were able to carry on had to do so in the face of great difficulty.

Of course the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Communist Party with its seductive promise of a quick road to Socialism made Socialist propaganda even more difficult but there was no disillusion. Members who came back to the country after the war and those who joined then found a mood of impressive confidence in the soundness of the Party’s case.

9).Crump’s Remedy Crump (page 10) doubts whether the S.P.G.B. can be changed into the kind of organisation he wants, but he adds this:-

“I shall continue to co-operate with those comrades who remain in the S.P.G.B. to continue the struggle there and I am hopeful that they themselves will go on to form strong links with revolutionary socialists active outside the S.P.G.B.. in this way the revolutionary organisation which we are all working to establish will be built, possibly as a revitalised S.P.G.B. but more likely independent of it”.

At which point it would be natural to expect the “revolutionary socialists” to be identified, but we are not told. Are they the “all sorts of radical groups” referred to on Page 2, but again not named?

What are their principles, policies and activities?

Party members who accept the Declaration of Principles on which they joined the Party will at least have been warned what to expect.

10 The Future of the S.P.G.B. In one respect Crump’s attack on the principles of the S.P. G. B. is to be welcomed: it provides the occasion to look again at certain aspects of the Party case at its formation.

The Party declared its acceptance of the basic principles of the Marxist economic analysis of capitalism. Experience has completely justified this against, among others, the Keynesian myth about the possibility of managing capitalism, so enthusiastically taken up by the trade unions and by the Labour Party.

Likewise the Party accepted the Marxist view about the necessity of gaining control of the machinery of government including the armed forces, as set out in Clause 6 of our Declaration of Principles. Subsequent experience has fully justified this against the futile and destructive advocacy of so-called “direct action”.

A third aspect is the Party’s function as a propaganda organisation for Socialism. Not being “economic determinists” the Party at its formation saw the need to explain to the workers the nature and the workings of

capitalism, to present the concept of Socialism as an alternative, and to show how alone Socialism could be achieved, and along with this to avoid the confusion that would result if we allied ourselves with reformist or other non-Socialist organisations.

Nothing has happened to invalidate this and in the meantime the fading attractions of Labourism and so-called Communism should encourage us to go forward with at least the confidence and sense of urgency of the founders of the Party.

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CECIL DEVEREUX (1908 – 2001): AN OBITUARY

It is with considerable sadness that we have to record the death of another member of long standing, Cecil Devereux, who joined the Party in 1934.

Cecil was born in York and his schooling included a scholarship to the East Anglian, where his thirst for knowledge included a mastery of Latin and Greek. After his schooling he qualified as a pharmacist and headed for London in the hope of finding a job. This was not easy in the early 1930's and for some time he was out of work. However, he met Kathleen his first wife (who, happily is still very much with us).

One of the tales Cecil told was of how, walking in the London of 1934, he passed a basement with area steps and caught sight of a skeleton hanging inside near the window. Although he walked past, he decided to retrace his steps and knocked on the door to enquire about the skeleton. The owner proved to be the unique Ted Kersley, a lively character keenly interested in all forms of art and its social origins and an active member of The Socialist Party of Great Britain. Discussion went on until the small hours.

It was not long after this encounter that both Cecil and Kathleen joined the Party. In those days in addition to indoor and outdoor meetings of Branches, there were many social events such as group visits to museums and art galleries where a member would conduct the tour and lecture; frequent rambles in the countryside where discussion could stretch over many a mile. He had a deep interest and often involvement in music and the theatre, perhaps outstandingly in the lively Sadler wells. In this atmosphere, both he and Kathleen revelled. On occasions there was wine; Cecil loved it and this love developed on walking holidays abroad.

Cecil gave many lectures for the Party and these always had a scholarly style, being clear to the point and well researched. He wrote a number of articles in the Socialist standard on drugs and society, but one of his favourite subjects was William Morris.

In June 1991, Cecil had no hesitation declaring himself for the reconstituted S.P.G.B. and continued to be regularly available with thoughtful, well-researched, up-to-date lectures (His most recent talk – **Karl Marx and the S.P.G.B.**, was on 10th December 2000).

In extending our condolences to his family and many friends, we close this appreciation with the tribute made at his funeral by his daughter, Jenny:-

“When we were children, we had a father who was different from other children's fathers. He wore a beret, carried a rucksack, walked everywhere and would only let us eat his homemade wholemeal bread instead of the white sliced bread that our friends ate, and we wished we had a father like other children's fathers. When we became adults we had a father who was different from other adult's fathers. He now wore a cap instead of a beret, still carried a rucksack, still walked everywhere and only ate organic wholemeal bread, and we were proud that we had a father who was different from other people's fathers”.

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Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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